LAFAYETTE VISTAS

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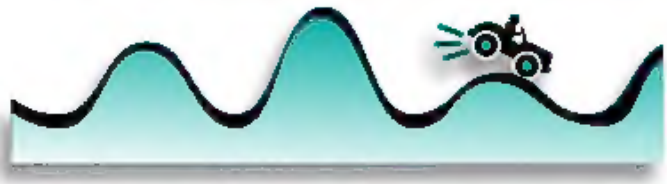

It's Been a Bumpy Road

Managing the City of Lafayette through the economic downturn over the last two years has been a bit like driving down one of Lafayette's aging and crumbling streets. With potholes, ruts and cracks, we slowed our speed and put a tight grip on the wheel to navigate through the many hazards, including State takeaways of city funding and declining local tax revenues. This edition of Vistas seeks to make our residents aware of the challenges we confront together as a city, share the proactive steps our city has taken to maintain valued programs and services (including pothole and road repair!) and ask for your input as we make plans for the uncertain stretch of road that lies ahead. We are heartened by a recent poll showing that 9 out of 10 Lafayette residents are satisfied with the local quality of life and city services. On behalf of the City Council and city staff, we thank you for your confidence and support through this challenging period.

Stop Thief! State grabs of local funding threaten local services

As we all know, California faces a seemingly never-ending and ever-expanding financial crisis. The State is once again struggling to deal with a nearly $20 billion deficit as the often missed deadline to adopt the state budget looms this summer.

To address its own budget shortfall, the State now, as a routine matter, takes funding that historically is reserved for local services like road repair, police protection and libraries. During just the last year, the State took more than $1.6 million from Lafayette.

The State's irresponsible fiscal management has directly and negatively impacted our own community. But what's doubly troubling is that virtually every expert expects the State's condition to worsen before it improves, and that Sacramento will intensify its efforts to take funds away from cities. The result will be that Lafayette – and Orinda, Moraga, and every other California city – will be less able to deliver the services that residents have come to expect and upon which they depend.

Feeling the Squeeze

Maintaining valued programs and services with declining revenue

Lafayette residents have justifiably come to expect excellent municipal services that lead to a safe community and a high quality of life...all the reasons we "Love Lafayette."

However, despite our long tradition of tight budget management, the declining economy and state takeaways have put pressure on the City and its ability to continue providing services that most Lafayette residents expect and we all enjoy.

City services are funded by a variety of revenue sources, each of which has declined in recent years. Revenue from sales taxes, property taxes, and hotel taxes have all dropped significantly.

As is the case in most cities, property taxes are an important revenue source for Lafayette. However, even during better times, Lafayette's share of property tax revenue is much lower than other cities. For every dollar in property taxes local residents pay, only about 6 cents (6%) comes back to the City. This compares to about 9% in Walnut Creek, 15% in Martinez and 19% in El Cerrito. Therefore, even though you may pay high property taxes, most of the money goes to the State and other agencies rather than back to our city to support local services.

Where do your property taxes go?

Keeping Our House in Order

Tight budget management essential in a tough economy

Controlled spending and balanced budgets have been Lafayette's practice for decades. Costs are kept to a minimum, revenues are managed carefully, and city programs and projects are reviewed annually to ensure they are operating efficiently. The City maintains an emergency reserve so we can respond in case of an earthquake, fire or other serious emergency and an independent auditor reviews the finances annually.

Due to this fiscal vigilance, Lafayette recently received the highest possible credit rating (AAA) from Standard and Poor's – a nice validation for the long-term effort. Only 25 cities (out of 490) in California and 169 nationwide are so highly rated.

(continued inside)

Q&A: Lafayette's AAA Credit Rating

Q. Why is a high credit rating so important for our city?

A. Just like a business or family, the City's great credit rating allows Lafayette to borrow money at favorable rates.

Q. What influences a city's credit rating?

A. The credit agencies look at the city's balance of revenue and expenses, emergency reserves, future obligations and past budget management.

Q. How does Lafayette's credit rating compare to other cities?

A. Only 25 of California's 490 cities have a AAA rating. Many cities have seen their credit ratings decline in the current economy because they were slow to respond to the downturn, have large unfunded pension obligations (Lafayette has none) and/or are relying on emergency reserves to cover basic expenses.

What about those (literally) bumpy roads?

Anyone who has driven through Lafayette – particularly on the smaller streets and cul-de-sacs – knows that our roads are deteriorating and need repair.

In fact, there are about 99 miles of streets and roads in Lafayette. Many are checkered with ruts, cracks, potholes and crumbling pavement. Nearly one in five of Lafayette's roads are now categorized as "failing", which is the lowest grade a paved road can receive. Given that roads must be improved at least every 12–15 years and will fully fail after about 40 years of use, the state of our roads is not surprising. Many of the residential streets in Lafayette are 30–40 years old and, despite routine maintenance, have never received significant repairs or upgrades.

Did You Know?

- **Lafayette has 99 miles of streets and roads**
- **1 in 5 roads have a failing grade**
- **The City spends $1.5M annually on road repairs**
- **$15 million is needed to fully repair roads**

Lafayette spends approximately $1.5 million each year to maintain roads. This only, however, covers the cost to rebuild about four or five residential roads. At the rate we're going, we estimate it will take 18–20 years to fix all the roads in Lafayette.

Repairing roads that are only slightly deteriorated is less costly than repairing roads that are failing. Repairing a completely deteriorated road costs 5–10 times more than repairing a road that is only beginning to deteriorate. Therefore, the most cost-efficient plan for repairing roads is to maintain those that are only beginning to fail, rather than allowing them to slip into total failure and be even more costly to repair in the future.

For several years, at scores of public meetings, residents and City officials have talked about our aging thoroughfares and the need to improve them. More recently, City engineers working with citizen committees have evaluated the state of our roads to determine which roads call most urgently for repair. They have developed a sophisticated algorithm to evaluate funding options and develop priorities, with the goal to spend our limited dollars most efficiently.

Over $15 million is needed to fully fund the repair of city roads. If we continue to delay, the cost will escalate. Thus, counterintuitive as it may seem, new funds for roads will, in the long run, save money.

Making the pieces of the funding puzzle fit together

Maintaining our roads is just one of many priorities for the City. Diverting funds from other equally important activities would impact the critical services that contribute to the safety and quality of life in Lafayette.

For example, police protection represents over 40% of the City's budget. Many people choose to move to Lafayette because it is a safe place to live. Lafayette, however, currently has the lowest police staffing per capita of any city in Contra Costa County, with only two officers on duty during some shifts. This limits our ability to respond to an emergency.

With more officers, we could have more police patrols, neighborhood watch programs, and crime prevention programs.

At times, just two officers protect all of Lafayette

The Lafayette Library is another example of an important service that our community values. The library provides after-school programs for children and youth, programs for seniors, and access to the Internet and research tools for all residents. The new library was built through the generosity of local residents, state grants, and redevelopment funds. Keeping the doors open is another story. While the maintenance costs and certain program costs are funded by a generous endowment from the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation, the County is responsible for basic staffing. And, of course, since the County has also felt the pinch of the declining economy, it has cut the hours the library is open.

Our community outreach indicates that our residents wish to see other city services protected and expanded. For example, seniors are the City's fastest growing demographic cohort, and have come to rely on our Spirit Van, as well as a variety of other services that help them remain inde-

pendent. Lafayette's Senior Services Commission recently completed a Senior Needs Assessment and determined that additional programs are needed.

We also pride ourselves in programs we provide for children and youth, such as classes, recreational programs, and after-school activities that work hand-in-hand with those offered by our excellent local schools. These programs could be expanded for our children with additional funding.

Taking Control of Our Own Future....Locally

Our city is focused on protecting the services that are top community priorities. To make it through this difficult period with our quality of life intact, Lafayette strives to enhance local control and reduce our dependence on the State.

We are continuing to review all potential options to make this happen and welcome your input and ideas.

We Really Do Love Lafayette

If you don't believe the bumper stickers, maybe you'll believe the hard data.

In a recent survey of Lafayette residents, 97% of those surveyed indicated that they are satisfied with the overall quality of life in the City of Lafayette, and 89% are satisfied with the overall job the City is doing to provide services to its residents. If those numbers *sound* high, that's because they *are* high. In fact, pollster Bryan Godbe said he has not seen such stratospheric satisfaction levels in any city during his 25 years in the survey research business.

Why the happiness? Well, certainly, Lafayette's great weather, stunning natural beauty, and proximity to the Bay Area's cultural treasures has something to do with it. But over the years the City, too, has remained focused on providing our community with high quality services and programs. We have completed dozens of large and small projects that have enriched and improved the community, including major efforts like the Lafayette Library and Learning Center, the recent purchase of 23 acres of open space on Acalanes Ridge (see back page), and the Veterans Memorial Building, as well as ordinary day-to-day improvements like the downtown landscaping and banner program, repaving the main thoroughfares, and providing transportation services for seniors.

As a result, we have a community that Lafayette residents have come to appreciate and enjoy and yes, love. In these challenging times, it is heartening to know that the community values these efforts.

Did You Know?

- **97% of Lafayette residents are satisfied with the quality of life in Lafayette**
- **89% are satisfied with local city services**

Top community priorities:

- **Preserving open space**
- **Repairing city streets and roads**
- **Improving public education**
- **Reducing traffic congestion**
- **Reducing crime**
- **Extending library hours and programs**

Source: Opinion poll of Lafayette residents completed by Godbe Research, January 2010

We Want to Know what YOU think.

Your priorities and opinions are critical to helping the City make decisions about the investments we make in roads, facilities, programs and services. Please complete the survey below by June 30 and mail to:

City of Lafayette
3675 Mt. Diablo Blvd., #210, Lafayette, CA 94549

How satisfied are you with:

- **The quality of life in Lafayette**
  ❑ Very Satisfied ❑ Somewhat Satisfied ❑ Not Satisfied
- **The availability of City services**
  ❑ Very Satisfied ❑ Somewhat Satisfied ❑ Not Satisfied

Priorities for Services: (Please rank each option as a high, medium, or low priority.)

- **Repair failing city streets and roads**
  ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low
- **Improve public safety**
  ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low
- **Support after-school library programs for children and teens**
  ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low
- **Fix potholes**
  ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low
- **Protect open space**
  ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low
- **Increase police patrols**
  ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low
- **Provide recreation facilities for Lafayette residents**
  ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low
- **Provide additional services for seniors**
  ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low
- **Other:** _____
  ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Comments: _____

_____

Questions: _____

_____

You may also fill out an online survey at www.lovelafayette.org

City of Lafayette
3675 Mt. Diablo Blvd. #210
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Around Town

May 12 **LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S ANNUAL POT LUCK DINNER** • 6–8:30pm, Lafayette Library Community Hall. Celebrate the Pony Express' 150th Anniversary and learn about Lafayette's place in its history. $10 donation requested. Bring a salad or casserole with serving utensils; dessert and coffee provided. RSVP and questions: 283-1848.

May 15 **LAFAYETTE JUNIORS 11TH ANNUAL TOUR OF LAFAYETTE KITCHENS** • 10am–3pm, Tickets: $35, www.lafayettejuniors.org

Acalanes Ridge Open Space Acquisition

Seven hundred eighty-one feet has never seemed taller. That's the elevation of the highest point along Acalanes Ridge between Lafayette and Walnut Creek. It's a windy, wildflower-strewn peak and from the summit you can see all the way from the Carquinez Strait to Livermore, from the Oakland hills to Mount Diablo.

Because it is located adjacent to the publicly-owned Acalanes Ridge Open Space area, local residents for decades presumed the ridge top was permanently protected. It wasn't. In fact, a developer had recently purchased the parcel, with plans to subdivide. Not any longer.

Due to a remarkable collaboration of three public agencies and a private foundation, the Lafayette hilltop – a landmark visible from 12 cities – will become permanent open space, saved forever from developers' bulldozers.

The final piece of the partnership fell into place in March, 2010 when the Walnut Creek City Council voted to approve $390,000 to cover its share of purchasing the 23-acre, $1.3 million parcel, the entirety of which is located within the Lafayette city limits.

Despite the fact that the land was located in another city, Walnut Creek City Council members were eager to support the multiagency deal because the property is adjacent to Walnut Creek's 170-acre Acalanes Open Space and the East Bay Regional Park District's Briones-to-Mt. Diablo Regional Trail.

The city of Lafayette, the East Bay Regional Park District and the Muir Heritage Land Trust were already on board.

After years of working through the Lafayette planning process, the Haji family - who live in Walnut Creek and own a transportation company - decided to sell the property to the land trust. The sale caps almost 40 years of efforts by neighbors and conservationists to save the property, which is zoned residential but surrounded on three sides by open space.

Most of the $1.3 million is coming from Measure WW, a $500 million bond extension East Bay voters approved in 2008. No money was needed from the General Funds for this purchase. The property adjoins hundreds of acres of open space and parkland, so hikers will soon be able to embark from the property entrance on Pleasant Hill Road to explore trails stretching from Mount Diablo to Martinez.

City Directory

For Council Members call: **284-1968**

Council Members

Brandt Andersson	**Mayor**
Carl Anduri	**Vice Mayor**
Mike Anderson	**Council Member**
Carol Federighi	**Council Member**
Don Tatzin	**Council Member**

Messages to **all** Council Members:
cityhall@lovelafayette.org

Administration

General Reception and	**284-1968**
Steven Falk, City Manager	**Fax: 284-3169**
Tracy Robinson, Admin. Srv. Dir.	**299-3227**
Gonzalo Silva, Financial Srv. Mgr.	**299-3213**
Joanne Robbins, City Clerk	**299-3210**

Community Development

Ann Merideth, Director	**299-3218**
Tony Coe, Engineering Srv. Mgr.	**284-1951**
Niroop Srivatsa, Planning Srv. Mgr.	**284-1976**
Ron Lefler, Public Works Srv. Mgr.	**299-3214**
P.W. Hotline (to report problems)	**299-3259**

If you observe illegal dumping in creeks & storm drains or accidental spills on roads, call Contra Costa Hazardous Materials Division 646-2286.

Lamorinda School Bus Program

Juliet Hansen, Program Mgr.	**299-3216**
	Or 299-3215

Parks, Trails and Recreation **284-2232**

Jennifer Russell, Director

Senior Services	**284-5050**

Police Services

Emergency: 24 Hours	**911**
Police Dispatch: 24 Hours	**284-5010**
Police Business Office:	**283-3680**

Anonymous Tipline, Traffic Enforcement, Suggestions & LEARN (Laf. Emergency Action Response Network), 299-3232 X 2205

Fax	**284-3169**
Address	**3675 Mt. Diablo Blvd. #210, Lafayette, CA 94549**
Website	**www.ci.lafayette.ca.us**

E-MAIL: Council/staff members can be reached via e-mail using this address format:
First Initial + Last Name @lovelafayette.org
Example: SFalk@lovelafayette.org

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